

A.B.C. DELAYS TALK ON A BLACKLISTING

Jean Muir Interview on 'Girl Talk' Help Up for Censor

By JACK GOULD

Jean Muir, the actress whose abrupt dismissal from a television program 15 years ago first exposed the existence of widespread blacklisting in broadcasting, was told yesterday that a recollection of her experiences could not be televised without censorship.

Hal Golden, president of A.B.C. Films, Inc., confirmed that one of the names that would be deleted from a taped interview with Miss Muir was that of the General Foods Corporation, the sponsor that discharged her in 1950.

Edith Schaffer, counsel to A.B.C. Films, Inc., said last night that "there is some mention of names that might expose the station to defamation-of-character suits."

She expressed the hope that "everything will be worked out" but said that she believed the American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., parent of the film subsidiary, should do the research necessary to confirm all statements by Miss Muir.

A spokesman for station WABC-TV (Channel 7) said yesterday that Miss Muir's scheduled appearance at 9 A.M. Monday had been postponed until such time as the editing had been completed. An announcement of her participation in "Girl Talk," a morning discussion program, had been made only three days ago.

"It's just absolutely fantastic," Miss Muir said last night. "History is repeating itself after 15 years. But this time I am free to speak up."

Dropped in August, 1950

Miss Muir was peremptorily dropped in August, 1950, from the cast of "The Aldrich Family," then a popular series. General Foods stated that she was being dismissed as "a controversial person" and that it was not passing judgment on the merit of accusations in "Red Channels," a privately prepared booklet that sought to link performers with Communist or Communist-front organizations.

The actress, who bitterly denounced a dismissal that came without any hearing, came to be a symbol of that entire period in broadcasting's history. Scores of actors became unemployable on the air because sponsors considered it unwise to engage artists whose presence might offend some customers for their products.

Many advertising agencies and the networks had loyalty officers to check on the acceptability of performers or, in some instances, to arrange clearances for those maintaining their innocence. A variety of blacklists circulated; clearances, sometimes involving fees, took the form of statements stressing a patriotic posture.

The timing of the indefinite postponement of Miss Muir's appearance on "Girl Talk" was almost parallel to that of her dismissal from "The Aldrich Family." In both, her appearance had been formally announced and then, over a week-end, quietly withdrawn.

Miss Muir said she had received the news of the postponement of Monday's show from Muriel Bentley, an agent, who had been advised of the development by Monty Morgan, producer of "Girl Talk."

A spokesman for WABC-TV said that the interview had been taped early this month, but in the rush of holiday programming it had not been cleared by the station's continuity-planning department, which has the last word on the propriety of statements made on the air. He said that roughly one-third of the "Girl Talk" programs were subject to editing, which usually takes the form of "blooming out" from the sound track phrases that might be objectionable. The technique is probably best known through the Johnny Carson "Tonight" program, where guests speaking extemporaneously may wind up with brief spots of dead air.

Mr. Golden said that A.B.C. Films had become aware of the contents of the program with Miss Muir only late Thursday, and he was not entirely sure of all the names whose mention by Miss Muir had disturbed his company's legal department. He agreed that the reference to General Foods would be one deleted.

General Foods is one of the most extensive advertisers in television, and its business is highly coveted by the networks. It is a sponsor of the Peter Jennings evening news program on the A.B.C. network.

General Foods Not Told

It was understood that General Foods had no knowledge of the A.B.C. incident. Comment was not available last night.

Miss Muir said she recalled mentioning also Young & Rubicam, the advertising agency that handled "The Aldrich Family," and the National Broadcasting Company, the network that carried the series.

The discussion of her blacklist experiences occupied about 10 minutes of the half hour. The other guests on the "Girl Talk" installment, as originally announced by WABC-TV, were Estelle Parsons, actress, and Meredith Anderson, public-relations man. The moderator of "Girl Talk" is Virginia Lee Graham.

The intervention of the A.B.C. Films legal department came only 48 hours after Miss Muir had talked on the "Red Channels" issue over an FM radio station that WBAI depends on listeners' subscriptions rather than on advertisers.

On the WBAI program, Miss Muir mentioned General Foods, Young & Rubicam and R.C. as parties that had played a role in her dismissal. She also mentioned the names of per-

formers who had committed suicide or had left the country in the blacklisting era.

Miss Muir, in her radio and television appearances, talked of her own ordeal, which included a period as a chronic alcoholic, from which she has fully recovered. She has resumed her acting career and is in demand as a speaker on the life of the woman in American life.

The Broadcasting industry's sensitivity on the subject of blacklisting was thought to have eased after the victory of John Henry Faulk, the humorist, in a libel suit against Aware, Inc., and Vincent Hartnett, who ran a service giving the political pedigree of actors. Mr. Faulk freely discussed his experiences on radio and TV stations.

Most circles in TV believe blacklisting has lessened in recent years. There still are actors, however, who can not work in television because they have rejected network and sponsor requests to clarify their political beliefs.

The reluctance of sponsors to have their names or goods associated with issues that may arouse controversy of any kind has come to be taken for granted, however. A number of sponsors elected not to present documentaries about civil rights because of possible ill will among white customers in the South. In testimony at a hearing before the Federal Communications Commission, a number of writers and advertising-agency officials said that knowledgeable dramatists now instinctively avoid subjects or characterizations that could invite sponsor disfavor.

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